

CHARLIE CHAPLIN, PHILOSOPHER, HAS SERIOUS SIDE

Few Would Imagine Him a Poet or Composer and With Intense Ambition in Literature, Nor Could It Be Thought Screen Mirth Maker Studied Life as Closely as the Most Ardent Reformer and Sought to Aid Humanity by Radical Action---An Unusual Interview With an Unusual Character

Portrait study of Charlie Chaplin, world famous motion picture comedian, as he is in real life. Small panel at left shows him with Jackie Coogan in one of his most popular and recent films.

PERHAPS the best known—and the least known—man in the world is Charlie Chaplin. It is really with Charles Chaplin that this article deals, for can you imagine "Charlie" Chaplin discussing "The Purpose of Existence"? However, the article does full justice to "Charlie" as well as to "Charles," for while the latter may opine that "nothing in the world really means anything," the former, who has gone to Europe "to recuperate his emotions," reveals himself as millions imagine him. Much light is thrown on this great world character.

By FRANK VREELAND.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN an egotist—Charlie Chaplin an iconoclast! It hardly seems possible. Yet out of his own mouth the king of the screen comedians convicts himself.

"Yes, I'm an egotist," says Chaplin, no matter how hard you protest. "I'm an iconoclast. I love to tear things apart. I don't like them as they are."

And it would seem, from the talk he gave the other day at the Ritz-Carlton while stopping in New York on his way abroad—his first trip to Europe in eleven years—that he was as he pictured himself. But it would require the pen of a George Meredith to describe such an egotist.

Make no mistake about the quality of self-concentration in him. He is neither overbearing, vainglorious nor snobbish. Those who spoke with him on his visit here found him one of the most affable and engaging of men. There is none of the aloofness in him to be found in screen performers with less than half his success. Nor is he cold and ruthless. When he is in the mood for it—and he acknowledges he is a creature of moods—he can be gay and hospitable even to casual acquaintances.

It is simply that he is confident in himself, that he has arrived at his viewpoint deliberately as a result of his career. He might be called an egotist by conviction. For all things are measured according to his personality. Fundamentally, every one is an egotist, more or less, in that vein, but Chaplin is franker about it than most. "Ah, yes," he declares, with a twinkle in his eye, "I think a very great deal of myself. Everything is perfect or imperfect, according to myself. I am the perfect standard."

And he waves his hand with boyish yet ironic smile, having settled that.

Hint of the Rebel in Him

Offset by His Success

His self-absorption can be understood on this basis, that now that he is independent, he resents anything which smacks of intrusion from the outside world that would seem likely to control or curb him. There is a hint of a smoldering rebel in him that would have broken out but for his success.

Chaplin says positively that he is not soft hearted. Admirers of his tender witfulness in "The Kid" will scarcely credit it. Yet when anything rouses him a glitter comes into his eyes, almost a fixed, hard stare, that is scarcely the expression of an ardent sentimentalist. Then again, when he speaks of Barrie, a shadowy, dreamy look drifts across his eyes—for he is a Barrie fan. But of that more later.

Personality is the most fascinating thing in the world—that study of the common qualities and the unique that link up and separate the great and the small. Chaplin says that nothing in life enchants him quite so much as personality—the human stuff. He himself is one of the most fascinating among mortals. He hasn't the simple, bubbling, direct appeal of his close friend Douglas Fairbanks. He is more subtle.

Some one has said that the great of the earth aren't really complex, they only seem so. Yet Chaplin is one of the most complex among men, a fact which leads to some apparent contradictions. One moment he will declare that he is wrapped up primarily in his own concerns; the next he will assert that nothing is of real moment and all life is ephemeral. But that, at bottom, is the expression of a mind quietly secure in itself and disdainful of the world.

Other Side of Chaplin

Revealed in His Own Word

All this came out in a talk in his suite at the hotel the other day in which he illuminated for virtually the first time the serious side of his nature, and all but psychoanalyzed himself. As he talked readily and pungently, he drank copious draughts of hot water with a pinch of salt, for he has suffered from indigestion and neuritis of late. He curled about the earthenware pots holding this stimulating beverage on the table exactly like a kitten around a saucer of milk, and drank with his left hand—though he gestured mainly with his right.

Those hands of his hardly seem in the flesh to have the delicacy and dexterity they possess on the films, until he moves them in a deft gesture, and then the instinctive grace shows. As he talks he clasps them around his knee, or digs them in his trousers or vest pockets, or thumbs them under his armpits, and on the rare occasions when he is at a loss for a word, he waves the right hand slowly in a circle to one side. His favorite motion would seem to be to consist of brushing the curly locks back from his forehead, or rumpling the gray hair in back. For already, though he is only 32, the snows of time are creeping through his dark hair. Meanwhile, his legs are behaving in an interesting and eccentric fashion, quite

as though they belonged to some one else. They will be sprawled straight in front of him, or curled around the rungs of his chair like a school boy, and sometimes one of them will be quite casually sat upon. They are never in the same place for two minutes.

The feet were encased on this occasion in leather bedroom slippers, and this, with the neat pin striped suit he wore, gave him not the least air of being dressed to receive company. He lounged back in his chair quite unaffectedly, and there was no suggestion despite the royal, golden decorations of the suite, that there was a king holding his morning levee.

From the summit of his thirty-two years and his five feet four inches he was asked to look back upon his life and say whether he was satisfied with it.

"I never really thought of that before," he said slowly, rubbing his head. "Of course," he went on with his quick smile, "it's hardly time for me to say at 32 whether I'm satisfied with my life. But I think I am. I think if I had it to live over again I'd do it as I have—only more so. I'd do it with less moderation."

Not Satisfied With the World.

Would Change Many Things

"But I'm not satisfied with the world as I find it. There are many things in it I'd like to change. Do I mean political and economic conditions? Well, yes, I suppose I do."

"But I'm not soft hearted about them. When I see such misery as that on the East Side it arouses my emotions, but it doesn't make me sentimental. My interest is caught—such things stimulate me. I know that if I found my lot cast there I shouldn't wait very long before I worked myself out of it."

"What is the purpose of existence? I don't know. I accept it as it is. After all, what is the value of putting such queries to one's self? It's enough that we're here, that all that has gone before has led up to ourselves. What does it matter what comes to-morrow? So far as we're concerned, we're the crown of the ages. Each one can consider himself the perfect fruit toward which evolution has been working. We're in this world to live—that's enough."

Despite this interest in himself, the comedian who has passed the recreation hours for thousands in hilarious enjoyment finds it very difficult to amuse him self in his leisure hours.

"I'm really very lazy," he explained with a frank smile. "My working hours are from 9 to 5, and I really don't do anything at all in my spare time. I don't like to make engagements to meet people or to go to dinners. The thought of getting ready for such appointments bothers me."

"And yet, when I've finished work I often say, 'I'd like to see so-and-so now.' 'Oh,' they tell me, 'you had an engagement to see him a couple of hours ago, but you broke it off.'"

"I don't drive my car about much. In fact, about the only thing I like to do is just ramble around. I swim a bit, but I'm not a sportsman. Yes, I know there was a picture of me in a magazine dressed in polo costume and standing beside a horse, but that was all a joke. I went down to Coronado to rest up a bit, and there was a friend there who had a complete outfit. He suggested that I put it on just for a joke, and then the picture was taken."

Has Dropped the Violin.

But Composed Own Music

"I don't go to concerts and that sort of thing. I used to play my violin a great deal up to a couple of years ago, but since then I've hardly touched it. I seem to have lost interest in such things. Yes, I've composed my own music, I'm ashamed to confess. Were they bright, gay tunes? Not at all—very sentimental ballads. Almost weepy. Some time ago I used to think it would be fine to be the leader of an orchestra. The grace as he waved his baton attracted me, the sense of command. I felt that way when I conducted the Hippodrome orchestra. But somehow I don't seem to care so much about it any more."

"Usually, I'm hard put to it till I set to work and amuse myself. I hate to think

of the effort it would require to go out and meet people, to go to the theatre. You see, I am lazy. I hate to think of the next picture I'm going to do right after I've completed one. I don't like to choose the idea for the story. I put it off till the last moment."

"I put off the day I start to work—and I'm going to defer it as much as possible in the future. I like to remain in a state of pleasant uncertainty until I feel in the right mood to start. I must feel a kind of glow, a sort of white heat or inspiration. Of course, it's impossible to maintain the quality of inspiration all through a picture. You can't really act except in a few scenes. After a time on each picture it becomes mechanical and you find yourself going a bit stale. Toward the end you feel as though you would have to flog yourself to finish it."

"So I like to save my acting spirit as much as possible. Some actors insist on acting even when they're rehearsing. I want every bit rehearsed thoroughly, all the technical details worked out very carefully. I say, 'Now, so-and-so crosses the bridge at this point; now I go over to the table; now I lift up this cup.' Then, when all these bits of business have been gone through thoroughly, I say, 'Now we'll act it.'"

Would Hate Perfect Picture.

Fearing It "Machine Made"

"But I don't want perfection of detail in the acting. I'd hate a picture that was perfect—it would seem machine made. I want the human touch, so that you love the picture for its imperfections."

It may be guessed from all this that Chaplin is something of an epicure of emotions, a connoisseur of feelings. He is—that attitude pervades his whole thought. He is inclined to be a sort of professional spectator, looking on and sampling life exquisitely, plumbing every sensation, even despair, for the sake of the adventure in it. Though he was born in France there must be Russian blood somewhere in his ancestry, for he relishes being introspective.

"The other night," he said, "I went to the



Here are the famous Chaplin shoes that cut such a dash in the mirth provoking movies. They have been soled and resoled again and again and are insured for a pretty penny because their owner considers them a fetish.

'Follies.' Fannie Brice is a wonder as a comedian when she says, 'I'm feelin' terrible, tank God'; that's a gem. But the rest of the production didn't move me. Even the pretty girls didn't stir me, and usually when I see them on the stage it puts me in quite a romantic flutter. I say to myself, 'You might meet one of them and marry her. There, that girl on the end—maybe she'll be your wife. Who knows?'

"Every time I sit down in front of a musical comedy I'm a potential husband. It excites me tremendously, and I like it. But at the 'Follies' I was struck with an impression of straining for effect. I was oppressed, as I often am, with a sense of the futility of human effort. That ovation given to Mary and Douglas the other night at the theatre was immense—but at bottom it amounted to nothing! When you come

right down to it nothing in the world really means anything."

"When I go to the theatre, so often I say to myself, 'Look at all this noise and bustle going on inside here, while outside real things are happening! Isn't it terrible? Look at that man there, striving so hard to please. He thinks he is important. Isn't human nature fruitless and depressing?'

"My mouth is drawn further and further down. I grow dismal and despairing. I realize what a perfectly good time I'm having with my emotions. Then I'm happy."

And the comedian laughed.

"Of course," he went on, "the reaction from such moods is pronounced, and I become quite gay. But I am always impressed with the fact that you can call nothing in life truly great. The best pic-

ture that was ever made, when it's shown, well, that's that"—he waved his hand—"and it's over. It's served its purpose, and passed on. Nothing in life is lasting or important. If God were to come along and pick up the Statue of Liberty the world would really go right on as though nothing had happened."

The telephone rang, and Chaplin turned toward it eagerly, and listened expectantly as his press agent answered it.

"That phone," he said, "has been buzzing constantly since I came here. I never knew I really had so many friends. And in spite of all the calls, each time it rings I'm just as curious as ever. Yet, no call is ever so momentous as I expect."

"I'm just as curious about reading fan letters. I get anywhere from 100 to 200 a day. They fascinate me. I hold one in my hand, and say, 'Who knows what wonderful message this may contain?' And the wonderful message is, generally, a letter requesting an autographed picture, that runs like this:

"DEAR MR. CHAPLIN: I've seen you so often on the screen, and I like you so much. Won't you please be good enough to send me your photo, so I can put it among my gallery of screen celebrities, whom I greatly admire?"

"Flattering!"

"I send out about 4,000 pictures a year. The pictures cost four cents, the postage and mailing another four cents, besides the time of the stenographer to answer the requests—this is on the authority of my press agent. If I once stopped to look through the heaps of mail I get, I'd never do any work. And the letters, once I do look at them, never mean anything. Few intelligent persons write fan letters. And those who do don't make me feel in the least indispensable. I feel the world would get along just as well if I should drop out of it."

"You see, I recognize that really too much emphasis is placed on the personality of a player, without distinguishing his personality on the screen from his character off it. He is much different out of a picture from what he is in it. Yet it's that personality they see on the screen, which is really a sort of impersonal quality, that the fans want to know. Of course, if you seek to know an actor just as a regular friend—well, that's different."

day. I found I was going stale. Nothing seemed to interest me vitally any more. When I think about my latest picture, I'd say to myself, 'What if it shouldn't be a success?' And I'd answer myself, 'What does it matter, anyhow?' Then I'd start to worry about my apathy, and having really begun to worry once more, I was happy. I enjoy worrying about my work—it keeps me interested."

"But this time it wasn't enough. Nothing really roused me but food—I love food. I'd finished 'The Idle Class,' and I had a number of scenes completed for my next picture. Then one day, as I was in my dressing room, starting to make up, I looked at myself in the glass suddenly, and said, 'See here, you're 32, and you haven't been abroad in years. You're not taking any fun out of life. You're going stale.'"

"Yes, perhaps it was the sight of the gray hairs that did it. Maybe I'd been working on too many pictures in the last year. I'd had a touch of the 'flu,' and that seemed to leave me depressed. At any rate, I decided at 11 o'clock on a Tuesday morning to go to Europe, and at 11 o'clock the next morning I was leaving Los Angeles. The rest of the company had been all ready to go on with the picture, but they're disbanded now. I don't care when the picture is finished. I'm going to have a good time."

"I shall go to England, where I hope to meet H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw—all the big men of that country. What places shall I visit in London? Oh, just 'spots.' I'll take a kind of Dickensian stroll. But particularly I want to see the Kennington Road. That's where I lived as a boy. I don't remember what it looks like, but I know I want to see it."

Going to Berlin and Madrid And Will See a Bullfight

"Then I shall go to Berlin. I'm most interested to observe what they've been doing there since the war, especially in motion picture producing. Also I'm going to Madrid—I want to see a real bullfight. No, I don't contemplate playing a bullfighter, though Frank Harris's story, 'Montez the Matador,' would be splendid to put on the screen."

"This trip, as I said, will be principally for the purpose of recuperating my emotions. You see, I want to express myself freely. Most of my life I've been so suppressed. When I was struggling along as an actor I was so afraid of what people would think about me. I'd harbor secret thoughts, but I'd be afraid to let them out. Whenever I met a man who dared to express unconventional ideas—ideas I thought were held only by myself—I thought he was a superman."

"That's one thing I do appreciate about success. It enables me to do what I please. I can say to myself: 'Let's go to Egypt to-day.' And I can go. I can think what I please."

"That's largely the reason why I don't care much about reading. I don't want to be fettered by other persons' thoughts. When I was about 19 I set out to read at a great rate. But since then my interest has languished. I scarcely read a magazine. Novels don't interest me. I like history a bit. I also rather enjoy modern biographies—stories that get me close to human personalities. The biography of Oscar

Identity Quickly Learned When He Travels "Incog"

"But I must admit that I like such interest. When I came here a year ago I thought I'd be unobtrusive. I didn't let any one know I was here. I registered at the hotel under another name. Yet every one seemed to know it presently. This time when I came East I thought at first I'd do it quietly, without any press agent flourish. I even considered I might go abroad incognito. I said to myself: 'Nobody will know you're around—it won't really make any difference to them anyhow.' Then I told myself: 'Nonsense! Of course it will! As if you could go incognito!'

"Besides," and he smiled candidly, "I enjoy it. (I like being patied on the back). So now I'm having a very good time. I'm really taking an emotional bolt

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